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Letter to My Nephew

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Abstract

I wrote this letter for an assignment two years ago. We had to imitate James Baldwin's letter to his nephew in 1962 by writing our own letter to someone of our choice. James Baldwin warned his nephew of racism towards African Americans in the United States. The professor said we could write it to someone who wasn't born yet, and I immediately thought of my pregnant sister. I wrote about my fears of how him being half white and half Dominican might get him bullied at school. Now that my nephew is one and a half years old, I decided to update the letter. I want to express to him how much happiness he brought into our lives in his nearly two years of life. It's been a wild ride having him as a nephew, but I wouldn't trade it for the world. I hope to have many more years with him.

To my nephew: Ezra Jeremiah Perez,

When your mother told me she was pregnant with you, I have to admit, I was scared for her. She was young, and your father was already working two jobs to help with rent and food and finishing college on top of that. Despite those fears, I was happy for them. I always joked with them how I'd rather be the cool aunt instead of a mother, and it was about to become a reality.

Even though you weren't even born yet, you were all your mother talked about, both online and in person. She would post pictures of her belly on social media every few weeks, and every time she'd visit our house, she would talk about how many times you kicked in her stomach. I could tell your father was a bit nervous, but he still couldn't wait to meet you. My own parents were hesitant as to how

you would affect our lives, but I could tell deep down that they too wanted to see you and interact with you.

On the day you were born, your grandpa showed me a picture of you, and I knew then and there I would do anything for you. My heart swelled, and I couldn't stop smiling. I kept thinking about all the things I wanted to do with you when you got older. Teach you to read, watch movies, play video games, go to your school events, take you to Disney World. So many possibilities ran through my head.

However, there is one fear that I have regarding you, one that I had before you were born. One I'm afraid will never go away. Your parents are an inter-racial couple, and that's something not everyone agrees with. Your grandparents and I never had an issue with your father originating from the

Dominican Republic, or anyone from his side of the family. My fear is that you will be ridiculed by strangers on the street. Or even worse, since you inherited your father's skin color, that you'll be treated harshly by police forces. As James Baldwin said to his own nephew in 1962, "I know what the world has done...for which neither I nor time nor history will ever forgive them, that they have destroyed and are destroying hundreds of thousands of lives and do not know it and do not want to know it" (Baldwin, 1962, para. 4). I wish I didn't have these fears, I wish people didn't care about such things and let innocent and kind people live their lives freely.

I want you to know that even though some people won't like you, or make outrageous assumptions about you and your parents, that there are others who will accept you for who you are as a person. There will be people who don't care about your upbringing as long as you've been raised with love and respect, something I know your parents give you an abundance of.

I often wondered who you'd resemble more, your mother, your father, or will you resemble them both equally? Or will you resemble your grandparents? Maybe even me? Will you be smart like your grandpa? More musically inclined like your father? Shy and introverted like me? Extroverted and bubbly like your mother? Kind and nurturing like my mother? No matter how you turn out, you will always be loved by us.

We love you so much now, and it will only grow as you grow as well. I want you to

remember that when you argue with your parents, or if you get picked on by kids in school or glared at by strangers. Those people don't matter, what matters is the love your family provides you.

Your aunt,
Jenna

I wrote this letter for an assignment for my Literature of Witness class two years ago. We were to imitate James Baldwin's letter to his nephew warning him of the racism in America during the Civil Rights Movement. Baldwin was an African American writer in the 1950s through 1980s. His main themes were about the mistreatment of African Americans during the Civil Rights Movement.

I originally wrote this letter not long after the death of George Floyd, and the height of the Black Lives Matter protests happening across the country. My nephew is half Dominican, half white, and I was afraid that he would be a victim of the police brutality I saw on social media if his skin wasn't white. Since he did inherit his father's skin tone, a part of me is still afraid for him once he gets older. So, like James Baldwin, I decided to warn him of these people who would do him harm. Even though the world has changed drastically since 1962, there are still people who have mindsets from that time period. I see videos of racist people online and sometimes I can't help but worry if my sister or nephew will be victims of those kinds of people.

References

Baldwin, J. (1962, December 1). A letter to my Nephew. *The Progressive Magazine*.
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Recommended Citation

Karr, J. (2023). Letter to My Nephew. *Made in Millersville Journal*, 2023. Retrieved from
<https://www.mimjournal.com/>